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ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades a growing number of states have required a content area reading class for secondary education. Preservice teachers in secondary education who are required to enroll in content area reading courses often have little teaching experience and may enter the courses with misconceptions about content area reading. Since misconceptions of content area reading can eventually affect its application, it becomes important to attempt to assess how effective courses are in shaping preservice teachers' attitudes. The purpose of this study was to investigate attitude changes in students taking a content area reading course in a small liberal arts college in Indiana. The 27 students were given J. L. Vaughan's "Scale to Measure Attitudes toward Teaching Reading in the Content Classroom" (Scale) twice, once early in the course and once at the end. Total mean scores indicated that there was an attitude change from the first administration of the test to the second; the scores, in fact, were very similar to those found by Vaughan himself. Results were also similar to those of B. A. Lloyd (1987). Students in Lloyd's study felt that their primary responsibility was to teach their content as they entered the course, and they did not change their minds. Additionally, both studies demonstrated that preservice teachers do not agree as they enter the course that reading instruction in secondary schools is a waste of time. Differences between this study and Lloyd's include the findings in this study that students did not change their attitudes toward specific content methods, helping students read on an interpretive level, and the developmental nature of reading. (Contains 2 tables of data and 12 references.) (TB)

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Does a Content Area Reading Course Change Preservice Teachers' Attitudes?

ED 384 021

Over the last two decades a growing number of states have required a content area reading class for secondary education students (Roe, Stoodt, & Burns, 1991). Unfortunately, as Orlando (1983) has pointed out, because the content area course is required students often resist the class. The preservice teachers who are required to enroll in the content area reading courses often have little experience teaching and may enter the courses with misconceptions about content area reading and their role as a content teacher, and they generally feel more allegiance to their discipline than to the teaching of reading (O'Brien & Stewart, 1990).

The secondary education students' misconception about reading as they enter the course may influence their learning in the content course and their eventual application of the reading methods to their own classrooms when they begin teaching (Reinking, Mealey, & Ridgeway, 1993). Therefore, it becomes important to attempt to assess and then change the attitudes of the preservice teachers enrolled in these courses. Do the resistant attitudes change as a result of the content area reading course?

Several studies have attempted to assess student attitudes to determine whether a course is effective in changing student attitudes toward content area reading instruction. These studies have all been completed at large state universities (Gillespie &

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Rasinski, 1989; Lloyd, 1987; O'Brien & Stewart, 1990).

The purpose of this study was to investigate attitude changes in students taking a content area reading course in a small liberal arts college. Will the changes in attitude that have been documented by Lloyd (1987) and by Vaughan (1978) at large universities be similar to those attitude changes in students in a smaller private college a decade or more later?

Method

The 27 subjects in this study were secondary education undergraduate students who enrolled in a required content area reading class at a small liberal arts college in Indiana. The students' major teaching areas were English, art, music, physical education, social studies, science, mathematics, and foreign language. Attrition in the study was due to student absences on the last day and two students dropping the class.

The students were given Vaughan's Scale to Measure Attitudes toward Teaching Reading in the Content Classroom (Scale) on the first day of class and again on the last day of class. The means of the Scale from the first-day and last-day administration were computed as well as the first-day and last-day means for each of the Scale items. The t-test was used to evaluate these data. The significance level was set at 0.05.

Vaughan's Scale is composed of 15 items that purport to measure attitudes toward the teaching of reading in the content classroom, including items concerning the role of the teacher in

helping students to improve reading and study skills, use content area reading methods, and encourage students to read. Six of the Scale items are negatively stated and nine items are positively stated. Students respond to the items by marking a 7-point Likert scale--7=Strongly Agree, 6=Agree, 5=Tend to Agree, 4=Neutral, 3=Tend to Disagree, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree.

Vaughan (1977) reported that two aspects of reliability were examined as the Scale was developed. He used Cronbach's Alpha to establish the coefficient of internal consistency, which was 0.87. The median stability coefficient was established at 0.77 with a range of 0.66 to 0.89. Pearson's product moment correlation was used to establish stability. Vaughan also examined the validity of the Scale and reported convergent validity, sensitivity to treatment, and discriminant validity data, which strongly suggest construct validity (p. 606-607).

Results

The total mean scores for the Scale demonstrated that there was a change in attitude from the first administration of the Scale to the second administration. As Vaughan suggests, the negatively stated item scores were reversed and an average for the total scale was calculated.

The mean for the first-day administration was 74.27 and the mean for the last-day administration was 87.45. According to the criteria set by Vaughan (1977), this places the attitudes of the students toward teaching reading in the content area in the average

they left the course (p. 608). See Table 1.

TABLE 1

VAUGHAN'S RATING SCALE FOR INTERPRETING TOTAL SCALE SCORES	
91-HIGHER	HIGH
81-90	ABOVE AVERAGE
71-80	AVERAGE
61-70	BELOW AVERAGE
60 OR LOWER	LOW

Mean scores for each of the 15 items on the attitude scale were computed for the first-day administration (N=27) and for the last-day administration (N=22). The t-test was used to evaluate the data. The level of significance was set at 0.05. It should be noted that all negatively stated items were converted to a positive scale for the purpose of data analysis. See Table 2.

The overall total mean per item for the first-day administration was 4.95 indicating that students were "Neutral" to teaching reading in the content area when they began the course. The last-day administration total mean was 5.85, indicating that students "Tended to Agree" that content area teachers should teach reading.

More specifically, students agreed that content teachers

should help students improve their reading ability, teach technical terms, help students set purposes for reading, and be familiar with reading theory. They also felt that teachers should be required to take a content area reading course and model an interest in reading. They did not see the job of teaching reading and study skills as belonging to the English teacher alone. Students enrolled in this course entered the course believing that the content teacher should primarily impart subject knowledge and they did not change their minds. Additionally, they did not change their minds about their responsibility to help students develop interpretive reading ability or about the developmental nature of reading. Most surprising was the result that they did not change their attitudes toward the teaching of reading skills specific to their content area.

TABLE 2

FIRST-DAY AND LAST-DAY MEAN SCALE SCORES
Negative Items Reversed

	First Day N=27		Last Day N=22		Significance of Difference	
ITEM	Mean	sd	Mean	sd	t Value	Sig of Diff
1. A content area teacher is obliged to help students improve their reading ability.	5.29	0.95	6.63	0.49	-6.34	0.00 **
2. Technical vocabulary should be introduced to students before they meet those terms in a reading passage.	5.07	1.54	6.51	0.66	-4.61	0.00 **

3. The primary responsibility of a content area teacher should be to impart subject knowledge.*	2.56 6.56	1.40	2.77 6.77	1.72	-0.48	0.63
4. Few students can learn all they need to know about how to read in six years of schooling.	4.30	1.64	5.09	2.09	-1.46	0.15
5. The sole responsibility for teaching students how to study should be with reading teachers.*	5.22 3.22	1.15	6.00 2.00	1.07	-2.44	0.01 **
6. Knowing how to teach reading in the content areas should be required for secondary teaching certification.	4.63	1.60	6.27	0.70	-4.72	0.00 **
7. Only English teachers should be responsible for teaching reading in secondary schools.*	4.89 4.89	1.42	6.40 2.40	0.79	-4.72	0.00 **
8. A teacher who wants to improve students' interest in reading should show them that he or she likes to read.	5.56	1.05	6.31	0.78	-2.91	0.00 **
9. Content teachers should teach content and leave reading instruction to reading teachers.*	5.11 3.11	0.97	6.18 2.18	0.85	-4.10	0.00 **

10. A content area teacher should be responsible for helping students think on an interpretive level as well as on a literal level when they read.	5.77	0.80	6.13	0.77	-1.59	0.12
11. Content teachers should feel a greater responsibility to the content they teach than to any reading instruction they may be able to provide.*	3.52 5.52	1.09	4.09 4.09	1.44	-1.54	0.13
12. Content teachers should teach students how to set purposes for reading.	5.22	0.89	6.00	0.97	-2.88	0.00 **
13. Every teacher should teach students how to read material in his or her own content specialty.	5.51	0.80	6.05	1.50	-1.49	0.15
14. Reading instruction in secondary schools is a waste of time.*	6.30 2.30	0.74	6.60 2.60	0.72	-1.26	0.21
15. Content reading teachers should be familiar with theoretical concepts of the reading process.	5.29	0.77	6.31	0.78	-4.57	0.00 **

* Negative items that have been scored in the reverse. The actual means are underlined.

** This score is significant @ 0.05 or higher.

Discussion

The first-day and last-day total Scale scores of these students are very similar to those found by Vaughan (1978). He found that the average total score for students on the first administration was 72. The total average for the second administration was 88. The students in this study scored a total Scale average of 74 points on the first administration and 87 points on the second administration. More recent studies of attitudes have not employed the Scale but have chosen to use open-ended questions or interviews which make a comparison more difficult.

Results in this present study are very similar to those reported by Lloyd (1987). Students in Lloyd's study still felt that their primary responsibility was to teach their content as they entered the course and they did not change their minds. Additionally, both studies demonstrated that preservice teachers do not agree as they enter the course that reading instruction in the secondary schools is a waste of time. This belief did not change as they completed the course. In both studies students had neutral attitudes toward the teaching of reading in the content classroom as they entered, and changed to have more positive attitudes as they completed the course. They believed that some of the methods they had been taught were valuable.

The differences between this study and the Lloyd study include the findings in this study that students did not change their attitudes concerning specific content methods, helping students

read on an interpretive level, and the developmental nature of reading.

It should also be noted that Lloyd collected his data on 187 students. The present study involved only 27 students. The limited number in the study, and the fact that only 2 of the students in the present study had major teaching areas of English, 1 in foreign language, and 2 in social studies may have contributed to the fact that attitudes were not changed toward teaching with specific methods or toward teaching at an inferential level. Studies by Lipton and Liss (1978) and O'Rourke (1980) demonstrate that English, foreign language, and social studies teachers have the most positive attitudes toward integrating reading strategies in their classrooms. Art, physical education, science, and mathematics teachers have significantly poorer attitudes toward integrating reading into the classroom. 17 of the preservice teachers enrolled in this class were from the content areas of mathematics, science, art, music, physical education and music.

Recommendations

Three recent studies concerning the improvement of attitudes among preservice teachers and subsequent integration of reading in the content area classroom have been made by O'Brien and Stewart (1990), Daisey and Shroyer (1993), and Reinking, Mealey, and Ridgeway (1993).

O'Brien and Stewart (1990) have demonstrated that preservice teachers value the traditions of school life and allegiance to

content disciplines. They suggest the use of field experiences, videotaped lessons, and the interviews of practicing teachers and students to reflect on instructional methodology and reading needs. Their approach suggests that preservice content area teachers might begin using reading strategies in their classrooms if they were to become more familiar with the actual needs of students and observe instruction in which content reading strategies have been integrated.

Daisey and Shroyer (1993) interviewed 40 university instructors teaching content and methodology to preservice secondary teachers to ascertain why some preservice teachers have negative attitudes toward a content area reading class. 7 explanations were given by these instructors: preservice teachers do not see the rationale for a content course, the content and methods course instructors who teach the preservice teachers are unfamiliar with the reading course, the preservice teachers are not readers and writers themselves, preservice teachers are loyal to their content areas, preservice teachers think the course is remedial, the preservice teachers have heard rumors about the course, and the preservice teachers perceive a conflict in learning style between the preservice teachers enrolled in the content areas and reading and writing. The recommendation from Daisey & Shroyer is that discussions among the university content area, methods instructors, reading instructors, and preservice teachers be initiated for the purpose of encouraging reflection about attitudes toward the integration of reading and writing in the content areas

as well as the subsequent use of reading methods in the content classroom.

Reinking, Mealey, and Ridgeway (1993) propose that attitudes toward and use of content area reading strategies could be improved through the use of a model of instruction in the content reading courses that incorporates knowledge of reading methods and practice with the use of the strategy. They suggest that content area reading methods are not being applied because independent decision making based on an analysis of the teaching situation is not the model used in content area courses. They purpose that preservice teachers should receive information about the method, a model or demonstration of the method, and have opportunities to analyze when the method should be used.

There is reason for concern that reading methods are not being applied in the school setting. This study demonstrates that preservice teachers have changed their attitudes toward reading in the content area, but as in other studies this has not been a complete change. The use of more field experiences, discussion concerning attitudes toward reading and writing, and encouragement of students to reflect on appropriate instructional methodology to promote the learning of content through reading and writing are all suitable means for promoting positive attitudes and greater integration of reading, writing, and the content area in classrooms.

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